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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 000022

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SUBJECT: SENATE STAFFERS MEET KING ABDULLAH, PARLIAMENTARY LEADERS

Classified By: CDA DAVID HALE FOR REASONS 1.4 (B, D)

SUMMARY

1. (C) A Government of Jordan-sponsored U.S. Senate staff delegation met with King Abdullah December 21 to discuss the U.S.-Jordanian relationship, peace process, and Iraq. The King urged all of the involved parties not to let the opportunity of the January 9 Palestinian presidential elections slide away. On Iraq, King Abdullah reaffirmed his support for the January 30 date, despite some misgivings, and his intent is to encourage full Iraqi participation. The King stressed Jordan's appreciation for U.S. aid, and spoke about the successes and challenges facing Jordan's reform program. The staffers met separately with House Speaker Abdul Hadi Majali, Senate President Zaid Rifa'i, and Deputy Prime Minister Marwan Muasher. End Summary.

A RARE SECOND CHANCE FOR ABU MAZEN

2. (C) The King told a visiting delegation of Senate staff members on December 21 that January 2005 will define the future of the Middle East, hopefully in the right direction. The election of new Palestinian leadership on January 9 will afford a rare second chance to former Palestinian Prime Minister Abu Mazen. The King stated his confidence in Abu Mazen but added that he will need support in order to succeed. Echoing the views of parliamentary leaders in a separate meeting December 20, the King stated that Arafat and Sharon were obstacles that Abu Mazen could not overcome as Palestinian Prime Minister. Abu Mazen's situation became untenable when, after repeated conciliatory policies aimed at jump-starting the peace process, Abu Mazen had little to show for his efforts. This time around, Abu Mazen will require stronger support from the international community, specifically the U.S. and Israel, but also from the Arab countries, according to the King.

3. (C) The King, in reaffirming his commitment to the roadmap, saw a window of two years for serious progress in the peace process in order for a successful resolution to be achieved. The process so far has spanned the tenures of eight different U.S. Presidents, and the King feared that it might take another eight. Emphasizing the importance of a viable Palestinian state--based on 1967 borders--as the only solution, King Abdullah said that he firmly believed Israel will gain a true partner for peace in Abu Mazen. The Arab world is ready to accept Israel's existence as a legitimate country in the Middle East, and it is now up to Israel to embrace the opportunity to make serious strides toward peace. Abu Mazen must be given room to maneuver if he is to be able to win popular support. In a separate meeting, Senate President Zaid Rifa'i said that Abu Mazen must not be handed a set of preconditions by the Israelis before negotiations even begin. Rifa'i stated, for example, that no one realistically expects the right of return to be part of a final settlement, but Abu Mazen must at least have it as a bargaining chip.

4. (C) The King stated that without a resolution to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, Jordan and the rest of the Middle East will look the same in 20 years as it does now. King Abdullah noted that King Hussein used to comment on the importance of peace for his children's children. As King Abdullah pointed out, that generation is now, and the current King does not want to be using his father's words for very much longer.

A HOPEFUL FIRST CHANCE FOR IRAQ

5. (C) On Iraq, the King expressed his support for the January 30 elections. However, he emphasized that the foremost priority for successful elections is the inclusion of Sunni Muslims in the process. The King, as well as Rifa'i, stated that there is a great fear in Jordan of a marginalized Sunni population and a commanding majority Shia Iraqi theocratic government modeled on Iran. If this comes to fruition, stability in the region will be threatened. The King added that the drafting of the new Iraqi constitution

will be a critical step in the Iraq's future. For that reason, it is crucial that the elections produce a representative government. If the elections go badly, the King suggested that the U.S. and Jordan think outside of the box, and potentially designate a special Iraqi task force to draft the new constitution.

16. (C) The King emphasized that enhanced security would encourage electoral participation. Rifa'i also attested to the great importance of internal security. Rifa'i commented that the de-Baathification and demilitarization of Iraq were detrimental to the process leading to a free Iraq. He expressed some hesitation about the January 30th date for elections. Rifa'i would have preferred to see more strides made in securing the country first, but acknowledged that as the date is set, the coalition and its partners must adhere to it.

17. (C) During a meeting at the Parliament, House Speaker Abdul Hadi Majali spoke of the opposition's success in attracting followers. With 70 percent unemployment in Iraq, a "resistance" that employs people, putting food on the table and \$200 a month in its members' pockets, presents a very attractive option. Saddam Hussein fed the people; so far, the new government in Iraq has failed to do so. Majali also stated that with its porous borders, Iraq affords an opportunity to "fight the Americans" to anyone who so desires. His suggestions: food and security. With these, the Iraqi public will embrace the coalition's efforts and the new government's legitimacy. Without them, the resistance will continue to present a more attractive option.

18. (C) On Jordan's role in Iraq, Deputy Prime Minister Marwan Muasher remarked in a lunch meeting that Iraq does not want Arab countries involved in domestic matters. Muasher did comment, however, that Jordan is glad to be helping U.S. forces in a "quiet way". Muasher expressed concern that Jordan's assertion that a Shia', non-representative Iraqi government will turn Iraq into the next Iran is being poorly received in the U.S. He stated that this scenario is not an exaggeration.

REFORM EFFORTS

19. (C) The King had expressed optimism about reform efforts in Jordan. The problem, however, is translating vision into action, and Jordan has sometimes set too lofty goals. He commented that U.S. support has been instrumental to Jordan's success. Reform efforts are three-tier: social, economic, and political. Political reform is only possible once social and economic issues have been dealt with. Echoing his sentiments on Iraq, the King said that if the people are poor and hungry, they will listen to extremists, making political reform impossible. The King was hopeful, though, that Jordan will achieve political reform in the near future.

HALE